

Defoe Daniel

**Augusta Triumphans. Or, the
Way to Make London
the Most Flourishing City...**



Даниэль Дефо

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Daniel Defoe

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LONDON THE MOST FLOURISHING City in the Universe

A man who has the public good in view, ought not in the least to be alarmed at the tribute of ridicule which scoffers constantly pay to projecting heads. It is the business of a writer, who means well, to go directly forward, without regard to criticism, but to offer his thoughts as they occur; and if in twenty schemes he hits but on one to the purpose, he ought to be excused failing in the nineteen for the twentieth sake. It is a kind of good action to mean well, and the intention ought to palliate the failure; but the English, of all people in the world, show least mercy to schemists, for they treat them in the vilest manner; whereas other nations give them fair play for their lives, which is the reason why we are esteemed so bad at invention.

I have but a short time to live, nor would I waste my remaining thread of life in vain, but having often lamented sundry public abuses, and many schemes having occurred to my fancy, which to me carried an air of benefit, I was resolved to commit them to paper before my departure, and leave, at least, a testimony of my good will to my fellow-creatures.

But of all my reflections, none was more constantly my companion than a deep sorrow for the present decay of learning among us, and the manifest corruption of education; we have been a brave and learned people, and are insensibly dwindling into an effeminate, superficial race. Our young gentlemen are sent to the universities, it is true, but not under restraint or correction as formerly; not to study, but to drink; not for furniture for the head, but a feather for the cap, merely to say they have been at Oxford or Cambridge, as if the air of those places inspired knowledge without application. It is true we ought to have those places in reverence for the many learned men they have sent us; but why must we go so far for knowledge? Why should a young gentleman be sent raw from the nursery to live on his own hands, to be liable to a thousand temptations, and run the risk of being snapped up by sharpening jilts, with which both universities abound, who make our youth of fortune their prey, and have brought misery into too many good families? Not only the hazard of their healths from debauches of both kinds, but the waste of their precious time renders the sending them so far off very hazardous. Why should such a metropolis as London be without an university? Would it not save considerably the expense we are at in sending our young gentlemen so far from London? Would it not add to the lustre of our state, and cultivate politeness among us? What benefits may we not in time expect from so glorious a design? Will not London become the scene of science? And what reason have we but to hope we may vie with any neighbouring nations? Not that I would have Oxford or Cambridge neglected, for the good they have done. Besides, there are too many fine endowments to be sunk; we may have universities at those places and at London too, without prejudice. Knowledge will never hurt us, and whoever lives to see an university here, will find it give quite another turn to the genius and spirit of our youth in general.

How many gentlemen pass their lives in a shameful indolence, who might employ themselves to the purpose, were such a design set on foot? Learning would flourish, art revive, and not only those who studied would benefit by it, but the blessing would be conveyed to others by conversation.

And in order to this so laudable design, small expense is required; the sole charge being the hire of a convenient hall or house, which, if they please, they may call a college. But I see no necessity the pupils have to lie or diet there; that may be done more reasonably and conveniently at home, under the eye of their friends; their only necessary business at college being to attend their tutors at stated hours; and, bed and board excepted, to conform themselves to college laws, and perform the same exercises as if they were actually at Oxford or Cambridge.

Let the best of tutors be provided, and professors in all faculties encouraged; this will do a double good, not only to the instructed, but to the instructors. What a fine provision may here be made for numbers of ingenious gentlemen now unpreferred? And to what a height may even a small beginning grow in time?

As London is so extensive, so its university may be composed of many colleges, quartered at convenient distances: for example, one at Westminster, one at St. James's, one near Ormond-street, that part of the town abounding in gentry; one in the centre of the Inns of Court, another near the Royal Exchange, and more if occasion and encouragement permit.

The same offices and regulations may be constituted, cooks, butlers, bed-makers, &c., excepted, as at other universities. As for endowment, there is no need, the whole may be done by subscription, and that an easy one, considering that nothing but instructions are paid for.

In a word, an academical education is so much wanted in London, that everybody of ability and figure will readily come into it; and I dare engage, the place need but be chosen, and tutors approved of, to complete the design at once.

It may be objected, that there is a kind of university at Gresham college, where professors in all sciences are maintained, and obliged to read lectures every day, or at least as often as demanded. The design is most laudable, but it smells too much of the *sine cure*; they only read in term time, and then their lectures are so hurried over, the audience is little the better. They cannot be turned out, it is a good settlement for life, and they are very easy in their studies when once fixed. Whereas were the professorship during good behaviour, there would be a study to maintain their posts, and their pupils would reap the benefit.

Upon second thought, I think colleges for university education might be formed at Westminster, Eton, the Charter-house, St. Paul's, Merchant Tailors, and other public schools, where youth might begin and end their studies; but this may be further considered of.

I had almost forgot the most material point, which is, that his majesty's sanction must first be obtained, and the university proposed have power to confer degrees, &c., and other academical privileges.

As I am quick to conceive, I am eager to have done, unwilling to overwork a subject; I had rather leave part to the conception of the readers, than to tire them or myself with protracting a theme, as if, like a chancery man or a hackney author, I wrote by the sheet for hire. So let us have done with this topic, and proceed to another, which is: —

A proposal to prevent murder, dishonour, and other abuses, by erecting an hospital for foundlings.

It is needless to run into a declamation on this head, since not a sessions passes but we see one or more merciless mothers tried for the murder of their bastard children; and, to the shame of good government, generally escape the vengeance due to shedders of innocent blood. For it is a common practice now among them to hire a set of old beldams, or pretended midwives, who make it their trade to bring them off for three or four guineas, having got the ready rote of swearing the child was not at its full growth, for which they have a hidden reserve; that is to say, the child was not at man's or woman's growth. Thus do these impious wretches cheat the world, and damn their own souls by

a double meaning, which too often imposes on a cautious, merciful, and credulous jury, and gives wicked murderers means to escape and commit fresh sins, to which their acquitters, no doubt, are accessory.

I wonder so many men of sense as have been on the jury have been so often imposed upon by the stale pretence of a scrap or two of child-bed linen being found in the murderer's box, &c.; when, alas! perhaps, it was never put there till after the murder was committed; or if it was, but with a view of saving themselves by that devilish precaution; for so many have been acquitted on that pretence, that it is but too common a thing to provide child-bed linen beforehand for a poor innocent babe they are determined to murder.

But, alas! what are the exploded murders to those which escape the eye of the magistrate, and die in silence? Add to this, procured abortions and other indirect means which wicked wretches make use of to screen themselves from the censure of the world, which they dread more than the displeasure of their Maker.

Those who cannot be so hardhearted to murder their own offspring themselves, take a slower, though as sure, a way, and get it done by others, by dropping their children, and leaving them to be starved by parish nurses.

Thus is God robbed of a creature, in whom he had breathed the breath of life, and on whom he had stamped his image; the world of an inhabitant, who might have been of use; the king of a subject; and future generations of an issue not to be accounted for, had this infant lived to have been a parent.

It is therefore the height of charity and humanity to provide against this barbarity, to prevent this crying sin, and extract good, even out of evil, by saving these innocent babes from slaughter, and bringing them up in the nurture and fear of the Lord; to be of benefit to themselves and mankind in general.

And what nearer, what better way can we have, than to erect and to endow a proper hospital or house to receive them, where we may see them tenderly brought up, as so many living monuments of our charity; every one of them being a convincing proof of a Christian saved, and a murder prevented?

Nor will this be attended with so much charge as is imagined, for we find in many parishes, that parents have redemanded their children, on increase of circumstances, and paid all costs, with a handsome present in the bargain; and many times when a clandestine marriage is cleared up and openly avowed, they would purchase the first-fruits of their loves at any rate. Oftentimes a couple may have no more children, and an infant thus saved may arrive to inherit a good estate, and become a benefactor where it was once an object of charity.

But let us suppose the worst, and imagine the infant begot in sin and without the sanction of wedlock; is it therefore to be murdered, starved, or neglected, because its parents were wicked? Hard fate of innocent children to suffer for their parents' faults! Where God has thought fit to give his image and life, there is nourishment demanded; that calls aloud for our Christian and human assistance, and best shows our nobleness of soul, when we generously assist those who cannot help themselves.

If the fault devolved on the children, our church would deny them baptism, burial, and other Christian rites; but our religion carries more charity with it, they are not denied even to partake of our blessed sacraments, and are excluded no one branch or benefit accruing from Christianity; if so, how unjust are those who arraign them for their parents' faults, and how barbarous are those parents, who, though able, make no provision for them, because they are not legitimate. My child, is my child, let it be begot in sin or wedlock, and all the duties of a parent are incumbent on me so long as it lives; if it survives me, I ought to make a provision for it, according to my ability; and though I do not set it on a footing with my legitimate children, I ought in conscience to provide against want and shame, or I am answerable for every sin or extravagance my child is forced or led into, for want of my giving an allowance to prevent it.

We have an instance very fresh in every one's memory, of an ingenious, nay a sober young nobleman, for such I must call him, whose either father was a peer, and his mother a peeress. This

unhappy gentleman, tossed from father to father, at last found none, and himself a vagabond forced to every shift; he in a manner starved for many years, yet was guilty of no capital crime, till that unhappy accident occurred, which God has given him grace and sense enough to repent. However, I cannot but think his hard-hearted mother will bear her portion of the guilt, till washed away by a severe repentance.

What a figure might this man have made in life, had due care been taken? If his peerage had not been adjusted, he might at least have been a fine gentleman; nay, probably have filled some handsome post in the government with applause, and called as much for respect as he does now for pity.

Nor is this gentleman the only person begot and neglected by noble, or rather ignoble parents; we have but too many now living, who owe their birth to the best of our peerage, and yet know not where to eat. Hard fate, when the child would be glad of the scraps which the servants throw away! But Heaven generally rewards them accordingly, for many noble families are become extinct, and large estates alienated into other houses, while their own issue want bread.

And now, methinks, I hear some over-squeamish ladies cry, What would this fellow be at? would not he set up a nursery for lewdness, and encourage fornication? who would be afraid of sinning, if they can so easily get rid of their bastards? we shall soon be overrun with foundlings when there is such encouragement given to whoredom. To which I answer, that I am as much against bastards being begot, as I am for their being murdered; but when a child is once begot, it cannot be unbegotten; and when once born, it must be kept; the fault, as I said before, is in the parents, not the child; and we ought to show our charity towards it as a fellow-creature and Christian, without any regard to its legitimacy or otherwise.

The only way to put a stop to this growing evil, would be to oblige all housekeepers not to admit a man and woman as lodgers till they were certified of their being lawfully married; for now-a-days nothing is more common than for a whoremonger and a strumpet to pretend marriage, till they have left a child or two on the parish, and then shift to another part of the town.

If there were no receivers, there would be no thieves; if there were no bawdyhouses, there would be no whores; and though persons letting lodgings be not actual procurers, yet, if they connive at the embraces of a couple, whose marriage is doubtful, they are no better than bawds, and their houses no more than brothels.

Now should anybody ask how shall this hospital be built? how endowed? to which I answer, follow the steps of the Venetians, the Hamburgers, and other foreign states, &c., who have for ages past prosecuted this glorious design, and found their account therein. As for building a house, I am utterly against it, especially in the infancy of the affair: let a place convenient be hired. Why should such a considerable sum be sunk in building as has in late public structures, which have swallowed up part of the profits and dividend, if not the capital, of unwary stockmongers?

To my great joy I find my project already anticipated, and a noble subscription carrying on for this purpose; to promote which I exhort all persons of compassion and generosity, and I shall think myself happy, if what I have said on this head may anyways contribute to further the same.

Having said all I think material on this subject, I beg pardon for leaving my reader so abruptly, and crave leave to proceed to another article, viz.: —

A proposal to prevent the expensive importation of foreign musicians, &c., by forming an academy of our own.

It will no doubt be asked what have I to do with music? to which I answer, I have been a lover of the science from my infancy, and in my younger days was accounted no despicable performer on the viol and lute, then much in vogue. I esteem it the most innocent amusement in life; it generally relaxes, after too great a hurry of spirits, and composes the mind into a sedateness prone to everything that is generous and good; and when the more necessary parts of education are finished, it is a most genteel and commendable accomplishment; it saves a great deal of drinking and debauchery in our

sex, and helps the ladies off with many an idle hour, which sometimes might probably be worse employed otherwise.

Our quality, gentry, and better sort of traders must have diversions; and if those that are commendable be denied, they will take to worse; now what can be more commendable than music, one of the seven liberal sciences, and no mean branch of the mathematics?

Were it for no other reason I should esteem it, because it was the favourite diversion of his late majesty, of glorious memory; who was as wise a prince as ever filled the British throne. Nor is it less esteemed by their present majesties, whose souls are formed for harmony, and who have not disdained to make it a part in the education of their sacred race.

Our nobility and gentry have shown their love to the science, by supporting at such prodigious expense the Italian opera, improperly called an academy; but they have at the same time shown no small partiality in discouraging anything English, and overloading the town with such heaps of foreign musicians.

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